

Small farm program benefits people and resources

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SHELTON, Washington — The Mason County Small Farms Program is designed to provide technical assistance, educational opportunities, economic opportunities, and a direct link to state and federal resources available to family farmers. Because of the unique partnership with the WSU Mason County Extension and the Mason Conservation District, the staff is able to provide conservation plans, cost sharing, educational opportunities, and help connect the community to local food producers.

{mospagebreak title=What is a farm plan?}

According to the United States Department of Agriculture's National Commission on Small Farms, "small farms" are defined as "farms with less than \$250,000 gross receipts annually on which day-to-day labor and management are provided by the farmer and/or farm family that owns the production or owns, or leases, the productive assets."

In 2002, 301 of the 320 Mason County farms met these criteria - that's 94%. That said, small farms play a vital role in our county's economy, food system, and natural resources.

{mospagebreak title=Program Description}

The Small Farms Program is a partnership between WSU Mason County Extension and Mason Conservation District. Together, they fund a full-time employee to address food and farm issues in Mason County.

As part of the WSU Small Farms Team, the program strives to:

- Build public support for agriculture
- Help farmers adopt practices that are sustainable-economically, socially and environmentally
- Unify farmers and consumers in developing local markets and community food access

- Preserve

Washington farmland for food and fiber production

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- Conservation

Plans (a.k.a. Farm Plans) to help landowners inventory the resources on their property (soil, water, livestock, crops, etc.), identify the objectives of their farm, and create a dynamic plan that reflects those objectives while protecting the quality of the natural resources.

- Cost-share

agreements that can pay for 50 - 75% of some approved Best Management Practices (i.e. waste storage structures, riparian fencing, cross fencing, composting facilities, gutters and downspouts, livestock heavy-use areas, and many more).

- Educational

opportunities - workshops, conferences, continuing education classes, field trips, on-farm research, etc.

- Access

to the vast resources of the Washington State University's Small Farms Team.

- Access

to USDA cost-share programs like CREP, EQIP, CSP, WRP, and others.

- Connecting

the community with local agriculture and building support through projects like the Mason County Farm Map, Harvest Celebration Farm Tours, the Food & Farm Network, educational displays at local events, and much more.

{mospagebreak title=Food and Farm Network}

The Food & Farm Network (FFN) is a way for all people interested in food and farm issues in Mason County to get together on a regular basis and share ideas and information. It is also an opportunity to educate ourselves on current food and farm issues. Mason County's FFN is brand new and we haven't set a regular meeting time yet. Please check back soon for a more concrete schedule.

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